

COASTAL CONNECTIONS



VOLUME 1 / ISSUE 1

A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION FOCUSED ON TOOLS FOR COASTAL RESOURCE MANAGERS

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2003

COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROFILE



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Hometown:

Miami, Florida

Education: Bachelor's in business administration with coursework in biology from the University of Central Florida, Master's in wildlife ecology and conservation, and graduate certificate in wetlands from the University of Florida.

One work-related accomplishment you're proud of:

Achieving CZM program approval for the Indiana Lake Michigan Coastal Program.

One personal accomplishment you're proud of:

I recently learned to play Mozart's Sonata in C Major K. 545. I suppose that my parents were right that one day I would regret quitting piano lessons.

Things you do in your spare time:

Hiking, reading

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THIS ISSUE'S FOCUS

BUILDING EFFECTIVE WEB SITES

In today's electronic environment, just about anyone can create a Web site for just about any purpose. But building an *effective* Web site with a specific purpose is a different story. Just ask Brian Long, public information officer with the North Carolina Division of Coastal Management (DCM). "We want to make our information easily available to the public," Long says. "That means continually asking ourselves, 'What makes our site user-friendly? Is it useful and accessible to all?'" For the past four years, Long and his fellow Web committee members have been working on the DCM Web site, located at <http://dcm2.enr.state.nc.us>, to make it as practical and easy-to-use as possible. The following tips have helped make the site a successful one and may help other coastal programs build a site or revamp their current one.

Planning

Create a Web team. If you have the resources, enlist people from your organization to help set goals and guidelines for the site. Gathering people from different job areas can help get a broader view of the needs of the Web site.

Define goals and objectives. Before deciding the what and how of your site, first determine the who and why. Who is the target audience of your organization and why do they come to you? One of the major goals of North Carolina's DCM was to ensure it was placing the information its audience needed on the Web site. The Web team reviewed the telephone and e-mail inquiries the organization received most often to help prioritize the different types of information it produces. Long says, "If people go to us regularly about permits and rules, then that ought to occupy a prominent spot on our site."

Organization and Layout

Decide how to group information. What will your users be searching for? If users look to your agency most for on-line permitting, for instance, organizing by task may be helpful. If they go to you for information on specific issues, organizing by topic is probably more appropriate.

Set consistent standards. Create a template for the site so that each page includes the same basic features. Your organization's name and logo, the main menu, page title, and contact information should be located in the same place on each page so that users always know where they are on the site.

"Chunk" text. Text on a Web site should be easy to scan. Break long text down into easy-to-read chunks so users can get what they need and move on. Lists and bullets also help make text scannable and can help limit text to one page to avoid scrolling.

Navigation

Use a clear, consistent system. As Long notes, "navigability is key." Create consistent menus that take users to and from information quickly and easily.

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fiction, especially early 20th century literature, playing the piano, weight training at the gym, learning to knit

Family: Husband, Larry

Favorite movie: *When Harry Met Sally*

In your CD player right now: *Thelonious Monk*—Ken Burns *Jazz* series

Laurie Rounds is one of the country's newest "official" coastal zone management (CZM) program managers. For the past four years, Laurie has been working to get CZM approval for the Indiana Lake Michigan Coastal Program, and this year she reached her goal. Although the process was long and challenging, Laurie notes that the rewards overshadow the challenges: "The support that we were able to generate for the coastal program continually renews my optimism for being able to bring about real environmental improvement and change."

Perhaps some of Laurie's success in building the Indiana coastal program stems from her original educational goals. Beginning college as a business administration major, it wasn't until an environmental biology professor introduced her to the myriad career opportunities in the environment that Laurie realized she could work on what she loved for a living.

Now that her visions for the Indiana coastal program are under way, Laurie has reignited her interest in another of her passions—the piano. After taking lessons for seven years as a kid, she has recently resumed the activity and is now up to playing Mozart. She, her piano, and her husband, Larry, reside in Indianapolis, Indiana.

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Follow the three-click rule. "You want people who come to your Web site to find the information they are looking for in three to four clicks," states Long. Keeping all information three to four clicks from the home page keeps users aware of where they are on the site and prevents them from getting frustrated in their search.

Link information in several places. Different users will look for information in different ways. Create links to information or documents on multiple pages to help ensure they will find what they're looking for. Be sure the links are appropriate, though—too many links and too much information may overwhelm people.

Add search tools. A search engine can help people find what they need immediately, especially a specific document or link that is lower in your site's hierarchy. Site maps also can help people determine where they can find the information they need.

Usability

Be the user. A Web site is a waste of time and money if no one wants to use it. If information is difficult to find, a user will look elsewhere. When reviewing his Web site, Long says, "I look at it as John Q. Public. I think, how would I find my information? Where would I look for it?"

Keep it quick. Something meaningful should appear on a site within eight seconds or a user will be tempted to exit it. While graphics are important to a site, make sure they are relevant and not too large in size to load quickly.

Long says developing such an effective Web site has helped the North Carolina Division of Coastal Management save time and money. It now distributes permit applications, posts its newsletter, and features brochures and pamphlets on-line, all of which have significantly cut printing costs. Long also claims the site is a hit with the public. "We're really pleased with it, and we've gotten a lot of positive feedback. We wanted it to be a good resource for the public, the state, and the agency, and I think we're doing pretty well."

WEB PAGE CONSTRUCTION ASSISTANCE: TURNING REPORTS INTO VISUAL STORIES

A new tool developed by the NOAA Coastal Services Center helps coastal programs build specialty Web pages designed to engage users. PIVOT (Performance Indicators Visualization and Outreach Tool) Web pages use interactive graphics to make coastal management plans "come alive." PIVOT pages help constituents understand the many components associated with an issue, illustrate the management plans to address said issues, and allow users to check the progress of the action plan. PIVOT sites are designed to complement, not replace, a program's existing site.

PIVOT was designed for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Estuary Program, but other coastal programs can use the concept. Build-A-PIVOT is a step-by-step Web page wizard designed to help programs with little to no expertise build their own PIVOT pages. To see sample PIVOT sites and get information about acquiring Build-A-PIVOT for your program, visit the Center's Web site.

Build-A-PIVOT

www.csc.noaa.gov/products/pivot/

YOUR SITE IS ON-LINE. NOW WHAT?

As if getting the look, content, and mechanics of a Web site worked out isn't hard enough, there is plenty of work to do once your site is on-line. You must constantly be sure your Web pages are up-to-date and working correctly. If an impressive-looking site contains the same information for months or never links to the correct places, users will eventually stop visiting it. A Web site's maintenance is just as important as its design.

Here is a checklist of things to do once your site is up and running.

- ❑ **Review your goals.** Ideally, the goals you created for your Web site will have some measurable objectives. For instance, if you wanted the site to help reduce telephone inquiries, you could measure whether you have received fewer phone calls since the site has been active. Evaluate all of your goals and determine if their objectives are being met. If not, you probably need to revise the site.
- ❑ **Get listed.** Register your Web site with Internet search engines, such as Yahoo!® or Google.® Check that your site contains all the search words users might enter so the search engines will find it.
- ❑ **Encourage feedback from users.** Include contact information or contact links on every page so that users will feel welcome to send comments. You could also ask users directly for suggestions to improve the site.
- ❑ **Select an accessibility tool.** Several software programs can help assess whether your site meets certain criteria, such as accessibility by people with disabilities or functionality with different browsers. Most of these tools can be downloaded from the Web.
- ❑ **Update the site.** Make sure everything on the site is current. If your Web site contains industry news or current events, update those sections frequently—preferably daily or weekly—to ensure that users will keep coming back. If anything on the site is highlighted as “new,” replace it after a few months with something newer or remove the “new” label.

WHERE TO FIND GRAPHICS:

THE NOAA PHOTO LIBRARY

If you're looking for free, high-quality coastal and environmental photos to use on your Web site, your search is over. NOAA has compiled over 25,000 digital images of the world's oceans and atmosphere in an on-line photo library.

You can search the library in three different ways: through organized “albums” that each focus on a different area, such as storms and weather, undersea research, marine animals, space, and sanctuaries and estuaries; through files of thumbnails; or by keyword. The images come from NOAA photographers and scientists, as well as private citizens who are willing to share their collections. Contact the library if you would like to donate any of your photos to the collections.

According to the Web site, most of the photos are in the public domain and cannot be copyrighted. There is no charge to use the photos, but you must credit the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/Department of Commerce unless otherwise instructed. Check out the library's collections at www.photolib.noaa.gov.

WE WANT YOUR INPUT!

The goal of *Coastal Connections* is to help link members of the coastal resource management community to the people, information, and technology they need. To do this, we need your input. We encourage you to send us your questions and suggestions for the newsletter, as well as updates on what's happening in your organization, such as new laws and policies in your area, major meetings or conferences, or new projects and programs. Please see our contact information on the back cover. We hope to hear from you soon!

Ideas for Upcoming Issues

Expect future issues to focus on the following tools and subjects:

- Beach renourishment
- Needs assessments
- Geographic information systems and remote sensing
- Metadata
- Risk and vulnerability assessments
- Smart growth

If you have a topic on which you'd like us to focus in an upcoming issue, please contact us with your ideas.

Coastal Connections is a publication of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coastal Services Center, produced for the coastal resource management community. Each issue of this free bimonthly newsletter focuses on a tool, information resource, or methodology of interest to the nation's coastal resource managers.

Please send us your questions and suggestions for future editions. To subscribe or contribute to the newsletter, contact our editors at

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NEWS AND NOTES



Coastal Program Managers' Meeting

From March 18 to 20, 2003, NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM) will host an ocean and coastal program managers' meeting in Washington, D.C. This annual meeting provides a forum for the nation's ocean and coastal program managers to meet, share ideas, and discuss problems and issues facing the resource management community. The overall theme for this year's meeting is "Valuing the Coast," which focuses on economic valuation and evaluation of our coastal and ocean resources. For more information about the meeting or to register on-line, visit www.pmm.noaa.gov.

Report Reviews State of Our Oceans

For the first time in 30 years, the nation's oceans and coasts are getting a thorough review by a national panel of experts. In March, the Pew Oceans Commission will release a report that documents the threats to the seas and recommends actions to restore and conserve ocean life. The commission, a group of scientists, elected officials, fishermen, and business and environmental leaders, discovered a number of problems facing the marine environment, including collapsing fisheries and toxic contamination of ocean resources. To learn more about the Pew Commission, visit www.pewoceans.org.

Transitions

Stuart Stevens has left the Georgia Coastal Management Program. No one had filled the chief position at the time of printing...**Dave Mackey** is the new manager of the Ohio Coastal Management Program. He replaces **Mike Colvin**...**Sara Hunt** is the new acting manager of the Alaska Coastal Management Program, replacing **Pat Galvin**...**David Ruple** has replaced **Peter Hoar** as the manager of the Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR)...**Woody Miley**, manager of the Apalachicola NERR, is retiring this March. No replacement had been named at the time of printing. **Kerry Kehoe** has left the Coastal States Organization and now works for the Maryland Coastal Zone Management Program...**Jamie Hawkins** is NOAA's new acting assistant administrator for ocean services and coastal zone management, National Ocean Service.

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